



Winning Presentations: Start Before You Start

We all at some point or another will be called upon to give a presentation. Likely it will be at work. But you might end up making a presentation during a community meeting or at church or at a book club. Even our kids are creating PowerPoint presentations in their classrooms these days.

Over the next three weeks, **we'll offer some tips for perfecting presentations—no matter who your audience is or what your subject covers.** We'll address things you can do before, during and after a presentation to get your audience's attention and keep them focused. And we'll show you how you can use the experience to create even more impressive presentations.

This week, let's start before you start.

There are certain things you can do ahead of time to make your next presentation go smoothly. **A good, effective presentation doesn't just happen** (each venue and gathering is different; and presentations tend to be fluid, changeable situations). **A successful presentation requires thought and planning and (perhaps most of all) anticipation of possible problems.** Approach your next presentation with these tips in mind:

Advance notice. Prepare an agenda in advance, and gain approval with everyone (especially the client or the people who engaged you) before continuing the presentation. And know exactly how much time you'll have available. Time the presentation so you can stay within that timeframe. Also, establish the client's goals—and your goals—for the presentation. Write them down, and refer to them often.

Practice makes perfect. Rehearse every part of your presentation from set-up to the Q & A session. Write out a list of possible questions, and address each one. Research your answers, and know what you'll say ahead of time.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"The dictionary is the only place where success comes before work"

— Arthur Brisbane,
American journalist

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Practice your presentation in front of a mirror, and read your script out loud. Better yet, practice in front of a friend or colleague who can give you constructive feedback. Pay attention to your voice—your most valuable tool as a presenter. Don't be too loud, and mind the tone, pitch and pace of your talk.

Mix master. Enhance your presentations with clever uses of newspaper clippings, cartoons, music, appropriate quotes or relevant experiences. Use your imagination. At a minimum, do something as simple as writing descriptive captions for slides rather than just giving them titles.

Don't talk to strangers. Establish a rapport with the audience before the presentation begins by greeting people individually as they enter the room. You'll connect before you even start.

Listen up. Use the casual greeting time before the presentation to chat with people, keeping your ears open for information that might bolster your presentation. Use that information to personalize and customize your presentation by recalling a conversation between you and one of the audience members about something pertinent to the audience you're addressing.

Next week, we'll look at what you can do during your presentation to engage, inform and entertain your audience.

CORSINI'S POINT

A good presentation begins long before you see your audience. Prepare an agenda, and use it as your guide. Make sure you stay within the specified time limit. Practice every part of your presentation—from the set-up to the Q & A. Get friendly with your audience; greet as many people as possible before you start. During the greeting, listen for tidbits of information that can personalize the presentation. And make your presentation interesting by mixing media. Use your imagination, not just the latest technology.

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